boat, sucking cigarettes or sipping bitter Arab coffee, but when the water is warmer a longer period is spent in the sea. Food is not eaten during the diving hours as it is considered bad for the diver's health. 228

The splash and swirl of the blue waters of the Gulf, often as smooth and clear as glass, the glistening bodies of the sun-burnt divers, the deep-throated chanting of the Saibs and the mounting piles of dark encrusted shells, are sights and sounds never to be forgotten. From time to time the cabin boy, who is found on each boat, collects the shells in sacks and piles them along the sides of the boat. As the sun sets the crew eat their light meal of dates, fish, bread and coffee and then sink down with pleasure into deep sleep along the decks. Then all that there is to disturb the silence of the night is the crackling of the fire burning on the portable mud hearth, the creaking of ropes and the splash caused by the line of the midnight fishermen catching to-morrow's meal.

Next morning the members of the crew are up early and gather around the heaps of shells which are more easily opened after having been left in the night-air, and with deft flicks of little curved knives they examine the oyster's meat so that not even the smallest seed pearl is missed. The despoiled shells are tossed aside, to be collected later and thrown back into the sea. As the pearls are found, their finders stick them between their toes until they have collected a number, which are then handed to the nakhuda or captain. The latter stores them in a great wooden chest, studded with brass nails after tying them in small squares of red cloth, that being the colour which is believed to show pearls to their best advantage. When all the shells have been opened the remains are thrown overboard, the decks swabbed down and the day's diving commences.

From time to time boats return to Bahrain to collect fresh provisions and for the medical treatment of the crew. Fresh water, surprisingly enough, is less of a problem, for near many of the pearl banks there are submarine fresh water springs, some of which have been controlled by pipes affixed by the Bahrain Government. The monotony of the diver's day is also broken by the visits of "Tawawish," pearl buyers, who come out in launches to the banks to offer ready cash for their purchases, and by visits of hospital and police launches from Bahrain. The end of the diving season, as well as the date of its commencement, is laid down by the annual proclamation of the Bahrain Government. [312] [437] [656]

Despite the tales of travellers, sharks and saw-fish are not a very great menace to divers, they are in fact a rarity and for many years no diver has been attacked by either fish. The blue jelly-fish is more feared than either, for with its long tentacles it can give a most unpleasant sting, and it is to combat it that in the jelly-fish season many divers wear a form of cotton combinations covering all parts of the body except hands and eyes. The detrimental effect of diving on the men's health is often exaggerated, and with the better diet and medical treatment the divers of today are a healthy set of men and compare favourably with workers in other industries. [136]

471 228 The financing of a pearl boat is a complicated affair. Formerly most boats were owned by their captains, but today the majority of the larger boats belong to land merchants. In cases where boats belong to captains but are financed by land merchants, the latter make a profit of about 10%, but in cases where the merchants both own and provision the boats they receive 20% of the profits. After deducting costs, the remainder of the profit is shared in fixed proportions, the nakhuda receiving five parts, the diver two and the Saib one.

437 228 When the nakhuda sells the catch he must always be accompanied by two members of the crew, to see fair play. Sales are carried out in an unusual way. If the nakhuda and the purchaser or broker do not want the audience to know the amounts offered for the pearls, and as the sales take place in the quarter of the pearl brokers there are always interested bystanders, they spread a cloth over their hands and bargain by a sort of deaf and dumb language. Once they have agreed on the price the nakhuda must obtain the consent of the two witnesses before the sale is considered valid. The value of the pearls is established in 804 435 228 a special way. In the case of ordinary pearls, they are collected in great numbers, sorted for size by a set of graded sieves, and each group is weighed and counted and their value in "chows," a form of measurement derived from the weight of the pearls, is discovered from a book printed for the purpose. Once a pearl or pearls have been assessed at so many chows, the question of the value per chow is settled by bargaining, the price per chow depending on the average shape, texture and colour in the case of bunches of pearls or in single pearls. In the case of pairs of pearls their value depends greatly on how well they are matched. Seed pearls, the smallest form of pearls, are sold entirely by weight, while a single pearl has been known to sell for as much as £15,000, as in the case of the Bahrain pearl which was eventually bought by a well known American lady.

228 433 It is very difficult to estimate the value of the Bahrain catch in past years, the figure for 1833 was estimated at £240,000, £400,000 in 1835 and £303,941 in 1896. In more recent years the Bahrain Government has given official figures which outline the history of the industry during the past quarter of a century. In 1833 it was also said that there were 1,500 boats leaving Bahrain annually for the pearl banks, and in 1896, 900. The largest number of Bahrain pearling boats has been given as 2,000 but this figure is probably an exaggeration. That the industry has declined is proved by the figures, in 1930, 509 boats manned by 19,300 men found pearls worth Rs. 2,125,000, while in 1948 there were only 83 boats with a crew of 2,000 and finding a catch worth Rs. 855,000. Although the numbers of boats and divers decreased by about 6 times and 9 times respectively it is noticeable that the catch only decreased in value by 2½ times and in 1950 the catch was worth Rs. 1,650,000, more than half of the 1930 figure.

228 178 433 The reason for the decline in the industry, which started in 1930, was the severe trade depression which began in that year and which reduced the wealth of those in Europe who were in the habit of buying